

Homiletics Analysis: Ezekiel 11

Content & Intent

This Text — Content:

Ezekiel 11 divides into two distinct but unified movements. In the first movement (vv. 1–13), the Spirit lifts Ezekiel to the east gate of the temple, where he encounters twenty-five men — leaders who are giving wicked counsel to the people of Jerusalem, telling them the city is a cooking pot and they are protected meat within it. God exposes this as false security built on bloodshed and injustice. Through Ezekiel, God pronounces judgment: these men will be driven from the city, handed over to foreigners, and judged at the borders of Israel. The section closes with a jolt — as Ezekiel prophesies, Pelatiah son of Benaiah dies, provoking Ezekiel’s anguished cry: “Will you completely destroy the remnant of Israel?”

In the second movement (vv. 14–25), God answers Ezekiel’s implicit question about the remnant. The people left in Jerusalem have been mocking the exiles, saying those carried off to Babylon are far from the LORD and the land is now given to “us.” God reverses the verdict entirely. He declares that He Himself has been a sanctuary to the exiles in the lands where they have gone. He will gather them, restore them to the land, and — the climax — give them a new heart of flesh in place of their heart of stone, put His Spirit within them, and establish them as His people. The section closes with Ezekiel’s vision concluding: the glory of the LORD departs the city and stands on the mountain to the east, and Ezekiel is returned in the Spirit to the exiles in Babylon.

This Text — Intent:

God is seeking to accomplish a radical reorientation of where His people locate security, identity, and hope. The false counsel of the Jerusalem leaders promises safety through position and proximity to the city and temple. God dismantles that false security by announcing judgment on the city — and simultaneously redirects His people’s confidence entirely toward Himself and His sovereign, gracious work of inner transformation. The exiles who feel abandoned and shamed are told: God has not abandoned them; He has *gone with them*. And more than restoration of place, God promises a transformation of the person — a new heart, a new spirit, the indwelling Spirit of God. The intent is to produce trust in God’s sovereign grace rather than in external structures, and to anchor hope in God’s own covenant faithfulness rather than in any privilege of position or place.

Subject Sentence: God dismantles false security in the city and promises the exiles a new heart, His Spirit, and full restoration.

Primary Claim: God is stripping away every false refuge — position, place, and proximity to the sacred — to redirect His people’s trust entirely toward His own sovereign work of inner transformation and covenant faithfulness. The exiles are not the abandoned ones; they are the carried ones, and God is already among them.

Interpretive Evaluation

The “cooking pot” metaphor (vv. 3, 7, 11): The twenty-five leaders use the pot metaphor to claim security — they are the choice meat safely enclosed within Jerusalem’s protective walls. God inverts the metaphor: the city is indeed a pot, but they will not remain as protected meat inside it; they will be brought out and judged. A secondary interpretive question is whether these twenty-five men are the same group as in Ezekiel 8:16 (the twenty-five men worshiping the sun at the temple entrance). The text does not identify them as the same group — these are named as “leaders of the people” giving political counsel, not priests involved in solar worship. Forcing an identification between the groups imports a connection the text does not establish. The Reformed reading treats them as a distinct group representing corrupt civic and political leadership, compounding the picture of comprehensive corruption across every leadership tier.

Pelatiah’s death (v. 13): The sudden death of Pelatiah mid-prophecy is interpreted variously. Some read it as literal, immediate divine judgment — a sign-act confirming the prophecy’s truth. Others (including some patristic commentators) spiritualize it as symbolic of the death of corrupt leadership. The grammatical-historical reading supports a literal event: the text presents it as a factual occurrence prompting Ezekiel’s genuine anguished cry. It functions as a divine confirmation that the word of judgment is not merely predictive but already operative. The Reformed reading affirms this literal reading while noting its rhetorical function: Pelatiah’s death mid-prophecy strips away any comfortable distance between prophetic word and present reality.

“A sanctuary for them in a small measure” (v. 16, ESV: “though I scattered them... yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while”): The Hebrew *miqdash me’at* (“small sanctuary” or “sanctuary for a little while”) is interpretively disputed. Some read *me’at* as quantitative (“a little sanctuary” — not the full sanctuary) and use this to argue God’s presence with the exiles is partial or temporary. Others read it as temporal (“for a little while”). The Reformed reading takes the passage as a whole: regardless of how *me’at* is construed, the governing claim is unmistakable — God Himself has been the sanctuary. The exiles do not need the Jerusalem temple because they have the living God. The *me’at* qualifier describes the current condition of exile, not a diminished presence of God. Calvin’s reading here is apt: God traveled with His people into Babylon, making His own presence the replacement for every institution they had lost.

The new heart and new spirit (vv. 19–20): Wesleyan/Arminian interpreters frequently read this promise as conditioned on human response — God will give a new heart to those who turn to Him first. The text does not support this reading. The grammatical structure is

unconditional: “I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them” — sovereign divine action, not human response enabling divine action. The Arminian reading imports a conditionality the text actively resists. Pentecostal and Charismatic interpreters rightly emphasize the Spirit’s indwelling here and should be acknowledged for recovering this pneumatological dimension; however, the fuller fulfillment is not a second-blessing paradigm but the new covenant gift available to all who are in Christ. The Reformed reading holds the promise as sovereign, gracious, unconditional divine initiative — the same promise fully realized in Jeremiah 31:31–34 and inaugurated at Pentecost.

The departure of the glory (vv. 22–23): Dispensational interpreters often treat the departure of the Shekinah glory in chs. 9–11 primarily in terms of Israel’s national calendar — the glory departing as a precondition for the tribulation period and the glory’s future return (Ezek. 43) as a literal millennial temple event. The Reformed reading does not deny a future dimension but insists the primary function of the departure in context is theological and immediate: God is not abandoning His people but separating Himself from a city and temple structure that has become corrupt beyond recovery. The departure grounds the promise of vv. 14–20 — God is not bound to the building. His presence relocates to be with His exiled people, and ultimately the promise of return (43:1–5) finds its fullest fulfillment in Christ as the temple (John 2:19–21) and in the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:22).

Key Canonical Support

- **Jeremiah 31:31–34** — The direct parallel: God promises a new covenant in which He will write His law on the heart, not on stone tablets. Ezekiel 11:19–20 is the same covenant promise rendered in different metaphor — heart of stone replaced by heart of flesh, God’s Spirit within.
- **Deuteronomy 30:6** — “The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart.” The promise of Ezekiel 11 is not novel — it fulfills the Mosaic covenant’s own eschatological horizon: God performing the inner transformation that external law could never accomplish.
- **John 2:19–21** — Jesus declares Himself the temple: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The departure of the glory from the Jerusalem temple (Ezek. 11) and God’s promise to be a sanctuary to the exiles find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ as the new and better temple, in whom God’s presence fully and permanently dwells.
- **Acts 2 / Ezekiel 36:26–27** — The outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost is the new covenant arrival of what Ezekiel 11:19–20 and 36:26–27 promised: God placing His Spirit within His people, transforming them from within, enabling covenant obedience not by external compulsion but by internal renewal.

- **Revelation 21:22** — “And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.” The trajectory from Ezekiel 11 — God as sanctuary to the exiles, the glory departing the building, the promise of full restoration — reaches its endpoint here: no building, because God Himself is the temple in perfect, unmediated fullness.

Aim: To demonstrate that God’s judgment on false security and His promise of inner transformation are two sides of the same sovereign act of grace — and to call the reader to relocate all confidence in God’s own indwelling presence rather than in any external structure, privilege, or position.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1	Spirit lifts Ezekiel to east gate of temple; he sees twenty-five men, including Jaazaniah and Pelatiah, leaders of the people	These are civic/political leaders, distinct from the priestly group in ch. 8
2–3	God identifies them as those giving wicked counsel; their slogan: “Is not the time near to build houses? This city is the pot and we are the meat”	The pot metaphor claims protected status within Jerusalem’s walls
4–6	God commands Ezekiel to prophesy against them; their sins named: they have multiplied the slain in the city	“The slain” may refer to judicial murder and oppression, not merely warfare
7	God inverts the pot metaphor: the slain are the meat, but these leaders will be brought out of the pot	The city offers no protection — it is a judgment space, not a sanctuary
8–10	Judgment announced: you feared the sword, so the sword will come; you will be judged at the borders of Israel	Judgment executed by foreign powers; the land itself becomes the place of reckoning
11	Restatement: the city will	Reinforces vv. 7–10; the

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	not be their pot; they will be judged at the borders of Israel	inversion of the false slogan is complete
12	The reason: they have not followed God's statutes but have acted like the nations around them	Root sin is covenant infidelity — assimilation to pagan norms rather than covenant distinctiveness
13	As Ezekiel prophesies, Pelatiah dies; Ezekiel falls on his face and cries out: "Will you completely destroy the remnant of Israel?"	The death confirms the word; Ezekiel's cry is pastoral anguish, not theological objection
14–15	God answers: the people in Jerusalem say of the exiles, "They have gone far from the LORD; the land has been given to us as a possession"	The Jerusalem residents' self-congratulatory theology: proximity to the land = divine favor
16	God's counter-declaration: "Though I scattered them... I have been a sanctuary to them for a while in the lands where they have gone"	God has been <i>with</i> the exiles — His presence is not geographically fixed
17	Promise of regathering: "I will gather you from the peoples... and give you the land of Israel"	Physical restoration is promised; this is not merely spiritualized
18	When they return, they will remove detestable things and abominations from the land	Restoration requires purification; the land reflects the people's covenant status
19	"I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh"	Sovereign divine act; grammatically unconditional; the inner transformation that makes covenant keeping possible
20	"That they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will	The purpose of the new heart: covenant relationship and covenant obedience — the goal of all redemptive

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21	be their God” Judgment on those whose heart goes after detestable things and abominations	history The contrast is sharpened: the new heart enables obedience; those who remain in rebellion face judgment
22–23	The cherubim and the glory of the LORD rise from the city and stand on the mountain east of the city	The departure of the Shekinah: God is not bound to the building; He has already moved toward His exiled people
24–25	The Spirit brings Ezekiel back to the exiles in Chaldea; he tells them everything the LORD has shown him	The vision ends with Ezekiel as messenger to the very community God has declared He is with

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1–13	False Security Exposed: The Corrupt Counsel and the Inverted Pot
2	14–21	True Security Declared: God as Sanctuary and the Promise of the New Heart
3	22–25	The Glory Departs and the Prophet Returns: God on the Move with His People

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: God dismantles false security in the city and promises the exiles a new heart, His Spirit, and full restoration.

Primary Claim: God is stripping away every false refuge — position, place, and proximity to the sacred — to redirect His people’s trust entirely toward His own sovereign work of inner transformation and covenant faithfulness. The exiles are not the abandoned ones; they are the carried ones, and God is already among them.

Applications (Five)

1. [Mind/Belief] — Identify the false security structures you have built your confidence on. The Jerusalem leaders believed they were safe because they were in the right place — inside the city, near the temple, holding positions of leadership. Their theology was geographic and structural: proximity to sacred space equaled divine protection. Ezekiel 11 demolishes this. The question for the hearer is not abstract: Where have you located your security in something external — a church membership, a Christian family background, a theological tradition, a ministry position? God does not negotiate with false refuges; He dismantles them. The work of this passage is not to frighten but to free — because the false refuge is always more fragile than it appears.

2. [Affections/Worship] — Receive the staggering claim that God has gone with you into exile. The exiles in Babylon were the ones who felt abandoned — stripped of land, temple, identity, and divine favor. The Jerusalem residents confirmed their worst fears: “You are far from the LORD.” God’s answer to Ezekiel is the reversal of everything they feared. *I have been a sanctuary to them.* God went into exile with His people. He did not stay behind in the building. He went where they went. This is not merely a theological proposition — it is a claim designed to produce wonder, relief, and worship. Wherever you are — in the place that feels most like exile, most like abandonment — this is precisely where God declares His presence. Let this produce not just reassurance but adoration.

3. [Will/Behavior] — Stop giving spiritual weight to opinions that evaluate your standing with God based on your circumstances. The Jerusalem residents’ verdict on the exiles — “they are far from the LORD” — was a theological interpretation of an external circumstance. They looked at who had the land, who remained near the temple, and drew theological conclusions about divine favor. The exiles were in danger of accepting this verdict. The hearer of this passage is called to actively refuse interpretations of God’s disposition toward them based on external circumstances — suffering, loss, displacement, the apparent prosperity of those who seem more “inside” than they are. Circumstances are not God’s commentary on your standing. His word is.

4. [Mind/Belief] — Understand that covenant obedience is the fruit of the new heart, not the means of obtaining it. Verse 20 states the purpose of the new heart: “that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules.” The obedience follows the transformation; it does not precede it or produce it. God does not promise a new heart to those who first demonstrate sufficient obedience — He gives the new heart so that obedience becomes possible. This matters enormously for how the hearer understands the Christian life. Moral effort applied to a heart of stone produces legalism, exhaustion, and eventually despair. The new covenant promise is not “try harder” — it is “I will change what you want.” Let this reframe both your understanding of conversion and your practice of sanctification.

5. [Affections/Worship] — Let the departure of the glory reshape your understanding of where God now dwells. The glory of the LORD departs the temple and moves to the

mountain east of the city — toward Babylon, toward the exiles. This is one of the most disorienting moments in all of Ezekiel, and one of the most theologically rich. God is not a temple deity. He is not confined to a building or a liturgical structure. When the building became corrupt, He left the building and went with His people. The trajectory that begins here ends in John 2, Acts 2, and Revelation 21: God making His dwelling in and among His people, ultimately in the Person of Christ, then through the Spirit, then face to face. Let the departure of the glory from the building produce not grief but wonder: He would not stay in a building when He could be with you.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Ezekiel 11 makes a claim of fundamental importance about the nature of God's presence: it is personal, sovereign, and portable — not institutional, structural, or geographically fixed. God's presence was not bound to the Jerusalem temple; when the temple became a site of comprehensive corruption, God departed and declared Himself a sanctuary to the scattered exiles. This establishes a principle that runs through the entire canon: God's dwelling is among His people, not in their buildings. Beyond this, vv. 19–20 constitute one of the most theologically dense promises in the prophetic literature — God will perform an inner transformation of His people, replacing the heart incapable of covenant fidelity with a heart capable of it, and placing His own Spirit within them. This is not moral improvement through human effort; it is sovereign re-creation of the inner person. The theological weight of the chapter thus rests on two pillars: God is not confined to external structures, and covenant faithfulness is ultimately the product of God's own transformative work within His people.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Ezekiel 11 is a key locus for the Reformed doctrine of regeneration and the new covenant. The promise of vv. 19–20 is explicitly unconditional in its grammatical form — God gives, God removes, God puts — and its purpose is to produce what external law could never produce: genuine, sustained covenant obedience flowing from a transformed heart. This is the prophetic foundation for the Reformed insistence that true obedience is always the fruit of a prior, sovereign, gracious work of God within the person — never the ground of it. The passage also powerfully supports the Reformed understanding of the church as a people, not a place. God's presence relocated from the Jerusalem temple to be with the exiles — and this trajectory reaches its fulfillment in the new covenant community where God dwells by His Spirit in and among His people (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19). The departure of the glory, far from being merely an element of judgment, is in the Reformed reading a gospel movement: God breaking free of a corrupt institutional expression in order to be present with His scattered, broken, exiled people. Grace pursues; it does not wait.

Main Takeaway

The false security the Jerusalem leaders were selling — you are safe because you are in the right place, near the right building, holding the right position — was already collapsing when God spoke these words, and it collapsed completely. But the real word of this chapter is not the judgment; it is the promise. God went with the exiles. He was their sanctuary when they had no sanctuary. And He promised not just to bring them home but to change them from the inside out — a new heart, His own Spirit within them, the ability to live the way He designed them to live. You do not need the right building or the right position or the right circumstances. You need the living God who goes where you go, and who does in you what you cannot do in yourself. That is exactly what He has promised to do — and in Christ, has done.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Treating the chapter as only a judgment oracle and missing the gospel movement.** The two halves of Ezekiel 11 are not disconnected — the judgment of the false security structure (vv. 1–13) *creates the space* for the declaration of true security (vv. 14–21). Preachers who spend the entire message on the corruption of the Jerusalem leaders and their coming judgment will produce conviction without hope — and will have missed the chapter’s governing intent entirely. The judgment is real and must be preached, but it is in service of the gospel declaration in vv. 14–21. The ratio of attention should reflect the passage’s own weight.
- **Abstracting vv. 19–20 from their context and reducing them to a generic call to personal renewal.** “You need a new heart” as a moralizing appeal — try harder, turn over a new leaf, commit yourself more fully — inverts the text’s claim. The passage does not call the exiles to generate a new heart; it promises that God will give one. Preaching that makes the new heart a human achievement or a condition the hearer must meet before God acts has gotten the passage exactly backwards. The call is to receive and trust a sovereign promise, not to produce a subjective experience of transformation.
- **Identifying the twenty-five leaders’ false security too quickly with the congregation’s cultural context in ways that become moralistic.** The pitfall here is using the corrupt leaders as a foil for a general critique of “prosperity gospel” or “cultural Christianity” without landing on the passage’s own claim. The application must move through the theological claim — God is the sanctuary, not any external structure — and not settle for sociological critique. The text is not primarily about bad leaders; it is about where God’s people locate their security and identity.

- **Reading Pelatiah's death (v. 13) as proof that prophetic prayer and intercession are dangerous or futile.** Ezekiel's cry in v. 13 is not rebuked by God; it is answered. God's response in vv. 14–21 is His answer to Ezekiel's anguish. Preachers should not leave the impression that prophetic intercession is risky or that God's sovereignty makes pastoral anguish inappropriate. Ezekiel's cry is the posture of the faithful prophet — pressing into God with the people's condition, and receiving in return not a rebuke but a gospel declaration.
- **Neglecting the canonical trajectory of the glory's departure.** The departure of the Shekinah in vv. 22–23 is a pivotal moment in the biblical storyline and should not be treated as merely one detail among others. Preachers who note it in passing without tracing its trajectory to John 2, Acts 2, and Revelation 21 will leave their congregations with an unresolved ending. The departure of the glory is not loss of hope — it is God repositioning for the new covenant fullness in which He will dwell not in a building but in and among His people permanently and perfectly in Christ.
- **Applying “God as sanctuary” in ways that flatten the radical claim of v. 16.** The Jerusalem residents had a coherent theological framework: land + temple + covenant = divine presence. The exiles had none of these. God's declaration that He has been their sanctuary *in Babylon* — without the land, without the temple, outside the covenant geography — is a stunning reversal of that entire framework. Preaching that softens this to “God is with us in hard times” loses the theological force. The claim is far stronger: every external marker of divine favor can be removed, and God's presence remains — because God's presence is not mediated by external markers. That is the word the congregation needs to hear.